

Overview of the Bible

1 and 2 KINGS



1 KINGS

1 Kings 9:1–11:43

Lesson 98

Wednesday, August 10, 2022

9:1-14 Conclusion to the building of the temple

9:1–9 God responds to Solomon’s prayer. Although this word from God is reported immediately after the dedication of the temple and is a reply to Solomon’s prayer on that occasion, the writer dates it after Solomon had built not only the temple but the palace as well, which took a further thirteen years (9:10). Whereas in 6:11 we are told simply that ‘the word of the LORD came to Solomon’ (perhaps through a prophet), here God appeared to him once again in a dream vision, as at Gibeon. The reference to Gibeon reminds us that the days of the high places are now over—or should be!

God tells Solomon that he has accepted his prayer and has put his Name in the temple forever; the meaning of this is again explained in terms of God’s attention being focused on the temple (3). This is followed by a third reference to the conditional nature of the promise to David. And it is the most somber reference yet, for here the negative side is clearly spelt out. Solomon is told what will happen if he and the people (the you is plural, see v 9) turn aside from God’s ways and worship other gods: the nation will be removed from the land and even the temple will be cast out of God’s sight (7) and become a heap of ruins (8). Clearly the promise that God’s Name and heart would be there forever was subject to the same conditions as the promise of an everlasting dynasty! By emphasizing the perils of disobedience, this solemn warning casts a shadow over the rest of the account of Solomon’s reign.

9:10–14 Further dealings with Hiram. Just as the account of the building of the temple begins with Solomon’s relations with Hiram of Tyre (ch. 5), so it is rounded off with a further note of their dealings. This time, however, the tone is not so positive, and this is not merely because it records a souring of the relationship between the two kings. Solomon’s transfer of twenty cities in Galilee to Hiram (in exchange for a vast quantity of gold, v 14) implies that Solomon’s dues could no longer be raised by taxation. Had his building projects become too lavish? Furthermore, the cities given to Hiram did not meet with his approval and he called the district ‘the land of good-for-nothing’ (NIV mg.). The implication is that the immense prosperity enjoyed in Jerusalem did not extend to the northern parts of the kingdom.

9:15–11:43 Greatness and folly

9:15–28 Miscellaneous projects. Various building projects (administrative centers, store cities and military installations) throughout the kingdom are listed, all built by forced labor raised from among the foreign populations remaining within Israel’s borders (15–23). Naval expeditions on the Red Sea also featured among Solomon’s ventures, undertaken with the help of the seafaring Phoenicians. Their goal, Ophir, probably lay in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula or on the east coast of Africa (or may have included parts of both). A further note on these voyages for gold occurs in 10:11–12, where it interrupts the account of the visit of the queen of Sheba. There the fleet is called ‘the fleet of Hiram’, which suggests Solomon left his Red Sea trade chiefly in Phoenician hands. Nevertheless, the undertaking redounds to Solomon’s glory, as does the quantity of gold, the precious stones and the almug-wood (apparently a type ideal for carving) which the voyages brought back.

The reference to Pharaoh's capture of Gezer (16) strikes a discordant note. In spite of Solomon's military might (4:26), Gezer (Jos. 21:21) had remained in Canaanite hands until conquered by the king of Egypt and handed over as a wedding gift to his daughter when she married Solomon.

10:1–13 The visit of the queen of Sheba. In this chapter the author returns to the related topics of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, bringing them to a climax before relating his fall into folly. The chapter shows how far news of Solomon's wisdom had spread, stresses the superlative nature of that wisdom, and illustrates the wealth which flowed to Solomon in the form of gifts and tributes from foreign rulers.

The queen of Sheba (in the south of the Arabian Peninsula) made her long journey to visit Solomon because she had heard of his fame and his relation to the name of the LORD (1). A more straightforward translation would be that she had heard of 'the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD'. While this might refer to the temple, it more probably sums up everything which Solomon had achieved, for he had achieved it as the ruler appointed and empowered by Yahweh. The queen came to see the famous king for herself and to test him with riddles (a better translation than hard questions). The content of her questions is not revealed; the important thing is that Solomon was able to answer them all and there was nothing which he could not explain to her satisfaction. She was also vastly impressed by the luxury of the royal court and (lit.) 'the house that he had built'. (Does this mean the royal palace, as the NIV assumes, or the temple?) After praising him in lavish terms, she bestowed on him gifts of gold, spices and precious stones, thus adding further to Solomon's considerable wealth.

For comment on v 12 see above on 9:26–28.

10:14–29 More examples of wealth and fame. Solomon's revenues in gold are summarized, and we learn that the queen of Sheba was not the only Arabian ruler to heap riches on him; he received gold from all the Arabian kings (15). Solomon's empire was so located that he controlled the chief trading routes northwards from the Arabian Peninsula, and much of his wealth in gold probably stemmed from that fact. Arabian merchants were forced either to trade directly with Solomon or to pay for access to outlets further north. We may guess that favorable trading arrangements were among the many unmentioned things which the queen of Sheba asked Solomon for (13).

To illustrate how common gold became during Solomon's reign, the writer tells of the 500 ornamental gold shields which he made, describes his elaborately carved and decorated throne overlaid with gold, and mentions the household objects of gold in the royal palace. Furthermore, the trading ships which Solomon operated along with Hiram brought back gold and silver from their three-year voyages, as well as ivory and exotic animals.

Solomon's wisdom and his fame in the ancient world are summed up for us in vs 23–25. Here we learn that the visit of the queen of Sheba was but one of many made by foreigners to Solomon's court; they came to hear his wisdom and showered him with gifts (including, of course, more silver and gold).

Finally, Solomon imported horses and chariots, exporting the latter to the kingdoms to the north of his economic empire and accumulating both for his own use (26).

All these snippets of information are woven into a vastly impressive tapestry. But the writer's handiwork also includes another thread. A strand of criticism runs almost invisibly through this whole section. The stipulations of Dt. 17 concerning the lifestyle of an Israelite king are subtly echoed here. 'He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold' (Dt. 17:17); this, Solomon did. 'The king ... must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them ...' (Dt. 17:16); Solomon certainly did the former and probably the latter as well, for his horses were imported from Egypt (28). In other words, it seems that the writer of Kings is not only glorifying Solomon in this passage but also criticizing him. His greatness was partly achieved by overriding the stipulations of Deuteronomy. In view of the solemn warning given in the previous chapter, this passage rings loud alarm bells!

11:1–8 Solomon’s foolishness. But this is only half the story. The writer now reveals that Solomon had many wives in addition to Pharaoh’s daughter. Again, this recalls a prohibition in Deuteronomy: ‘He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray’ (Dt. 17:17). The inobtrusive thread of criticism now becomes clearly visible. These were foreign women, from nations with which intermarriage was forbidden in Deuteronomy (v 2 summarizes Dt. 7:3–4). In the latter part of his reign Solomon built high places where his foreign wives could worship their native gods (7–8), and his own devotion to Yahweh became diluted (4–5). This is the ultimate irony: the king who built the temple, thus making the high places obsolete, went on to build high places himself—and for the worship of other gods! Twice in these verses we are told that in behaving this way Solomon failed to live up to the wholehearted commitment shown by David (4, 6)—a requirement clearly stated in 9:4. The stage seems set for immediate disaster.

11:9–13 God’s verdict. Here God speaks to Solomon for the fourth and final time. We are reminded that God had appeared to him twice, stressing that Solomon had received very special benefits. But in spite of these personal encounters with the God of Israel, Solomon had strayed from following him. Disaster was indeed on its way. But for the sake of David, it would be postponed until the reign of Solomon’s successor, and when it came it would not deprive him of the whole kingdom. In other words, the commitments which God had previously made to David would still be honored, but in a drastically altered form because of Solomon’s disobedience.

11:14–25 Adversaries arise. Solomon had previously declared that he had no adversaries (5:4), but here he acquired two. (The Hebrew word translated adversary in 11:14 and 23 is the same as that in 5:4.) Although God had announced that calamity would not strike until after Solomon’s death, the storm-clouds began to gather during his lifetime. The empire created by David began to fray at the edges as Edom in the south and Aram in the north became hostile states. The warm relationship between Hadad of Edom and the Egyptian Pharaoh strikes a further ominous note.

11:26–40 Jeroboam’s rebellion. Jeroboam is introduced as an able leader, entrusted by Solomon with the entire labour force of the northern tribes. Ahijah is the first of a number of prophets in 1 and 2 Kings who intervened to alter the course of dynastic succession. His prophecy was acted out in a manner typical of OT prophets: he symbolically tore up his new cloak and urged Jeroboam to take ten of the twelve pieces. His words explained the meaning of his actions: God was going to tear the kingdom from Solomon’s hand and give ten tribes to Jeroboam. The statement that one tribe would remain for Solomon’s son to rule is puzzling; for when ten tribes are taken from twelve, there should be two left! A possible solution is that the one tribe is not Judah but Benjamin, which did continue to be associated with Judah when the kingdom divided. Judah itself does not require any mention because it was the tribe of the royal house anyway, and hence is assumed to continue in its control.

The worship of foreign deities is again given as the reason for the loss, which was to befall the house of David, but here it is not Solomon alone who is guilty but they (33), implying that the people in general had fallen into the same sin. The Greek, Latin and Syriac versions have ‘he’ in place of they, referring back to Solomon in v 31 and so keeping to the tone of vs 9–13, where only Solomon is charged with unfaithfulness. These versions may preserve the original reading, but if the Hebrew ‘they’ is original we must conclude that Solomon’s folly was part of a wider trend, which the king’s example may even have started.

Ironically, Ahijah’s prophecy to Jeroboam in vs 37–38 echoes the promise God had previously made to Solomon (9:4–5).

Either because Solomon somehow heard of Ahijah’s prophecy, or because Jeroboam made some move to stake his claim to the northern tribes, Solomon tried to kill him, and he escaped to Egypt. Jeroboam thus became an exile from his homeland, just as Solomon’s other adversaries had been. The Pharaoh is now named as Shishak. He is Shoshenq I (945–924 BC), founder of Egypt’s Twenty-second Dynasty, who later sent troops against Jerusalem (14:25–26).

11:41–43 The death of Solomon. Although Solomon’s reign had been extraordinary, the notice of his death is of a simple form used commonly in Kings. It refers the reader to a source of further information and tersely gives the place and length of reign, notice of burial and the name of his successor.

In one sense, Solomon’s reign had begun a new era, for he had built the temple and so transformed the worship and life of the nation. But in another sense, he brought an era to an end; because of his own disobedience he was the last king to rule over all the Israelite tribes.¹

John J. Bimson, *“1 and 2 Kings,”* in New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 349–351.